



House Transportation Committee Hearing

“Private Driver Education and Training Schools”

August 10, 2021

Good afternoon, Chairman Hennessey, Chairman Carroll, and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Dr. Brian Gasper and I serve as Chief of the Division of Instructional Quality within the Department of Education’s Bureau of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction.

Thank you for inviting us to discuss House Bill 1244, which would transfer all private driver education training and testing responsibilities from the Department of Education to the Department of Transportation (PennDOT).

The Department of Education does not oppose the intention of the bill in its effort to update Private Driver Training School (PDTs) laws and acknowledges that the concerns expressed by this committee are valid and that updates would be beneficial. However, the department maintains that the same positive outcome may be reached by updating current Education regulations (Pa. Code Title 22, Chapter 101) and implementing other operational changes. In fact, many of the changes being proposed in this bill are either being implemented by the department or are under review by the department.

Under this approach the department would continue providing the comprehensive driver training and curriculum that was first developed in July 2000 (updated in 2018) through the Departments of Transportation and Education under a grant provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The program is based on the Enhanced Driver Education Curriculum through Indiana University of Pennsylvania’s Highway Safety Center and allows the Commonwealth to provide a uniform set of laws and regulations to govern all driver education programs. The department has approved 187 private driver training schools through this program, and those schools provide service to citizens in 41 counties. In addition, public schools provide driver education programs in 64 of the 67 counties.

The department believes that we all want the same outcome - a comprehensive program that provides well-trained driving instructors who in turn provide quality driver education and training to novice and beginner drivers. We are confident that regulatory and operational changes can be made to reach this goal.

As the committee reviews the bill, the department offers the following observations and suggestions:

- Currently, Section 1519 of the School Code permits PDTs instructors to provide driver education in public schools when a certificated educator is not available to

fill a vacancy at the public school. If the department were removed from this oversight, PDTS schools would not be permitted to offer driver education to public school students without amending Section 1519. Approximately 44,829 students each year take driver education through a PDTS.

- 1508.2(c): The department already has an established driver education curriculum - the Pennsylvania Enhanced Driver Education Program Guide. The department is currently collaboratively working with PennDOT to ensure the content of the exam encompasses high priority focus areas of both departments.
- 1508.2(c)(2): Abbreviated licensing process of licensure... authorized to administer 3rd party examinations - This language would only serve to benefit 21 of the 187 PDTS currently licensed by PDE. That is only 11% of the total PDTS. Those 21 PDTS have contracts with Penn DOT to administer the 3rd party non-CDL driving examination. The department believes this creates a competitive disadvantage for the remaining 166 PDTS and suggests that this language is removed from the bill.
- 1508.2(c)(3): Current regulation (Pa. Code Title 22, § 101.153) already establishes that the instructor examinations shall be given at various stipulated locations throughout the Commonwealth. The department is currently evaluating how to expand the number of examination locations in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh and southeastern PA.
- 1508.2(c)(4): The department is conducting a comprehensive review of the current examination in conjunction with PennDOT and assessment professionals.
- 1508.2(f): Driver Education Instructor and the use of the word "Volunteering." The bill does not explicitly address background checks for PDTS instructors who are often providing instruction to minors. The department is concerned that this may allow for unregulated individuals to act as driving instructors without first being vetted and going through clearances and background checks.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment today on House Bill 1244.